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SUBJECT: JORDAN CHANGES HUMANITARIAN PLANNING TO ACCEPT
IRAQI REFUGEES IN FIRST STAGE OF ANY CONFLICT

REF: 02 STATE 262459

Classified By: CDA Greg Berry per 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Summary and comment: The Prime Minister, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and JAF Assistant Chief of Staff confirmed in separate meetings that, in the event of hostilities in Iraq, the GOJ would allow 10,000 to 20,000 Iraqi refugees to enter Jordan on a "temporary basis." JAF Assistant Chief of Staff reported the GOJ would set up four separate installations for processing of refugees and TCNs: a staging facility on the Iraqi/Jordanian border to screen refugees and TCNs; two camps with a capacity of 25,000 each at Ruweished, Jordan (H-4); and a camp at Nadayim airbase inside Iraq, to be established when events make that possible. This is an important practical change from previous GOJ policy and contrasts with continuing public GOJ statements which insist that Jordanian borders will remain closed to all except third-country nationals in the event of hostilities. (It is essential that we respect the Jordanians' requirement for confidentiality on this issue. It is highly sensitive in the Jordanian political context.)

2. (S) The GOJ and UNHCR are in the process of negotiating an MOU to delineate responsibilities but negotiations reportedly have snagged over the GOJ's financial requests. The GOJ has asked UNHCR for 51 million JD (approx USD 70 million) to cover its costs, but UNHCR has told us it will cover only humanitarian assistance costs and not related development and infrastructure costs. We will obtain a list of Jordan's estimated assistance costs from the Ministry of Planning and report via septel. Given this apparent change in GOJ policy, it could be useful for members of the PRM/USAID Humanitarian Planning Team to travel to Jordan to brief senior GOJ officials on the planned USG humanitarian response and possible USG support to the international community's and GOJ's humanitarian assistance efforts. End summary and comment.

PM: Iraqi Refugees to be Allowed Entry

3. (S) Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb informed the Ambassador January 8 that, in the event of hostilities in Iraq, the GOJ would allow Iraqi refugees to enter Jordan and would provide camps and some assistance inside the Jordanian border. The PM also referred to a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR that would detail the arrangements for camps and first asylum procedures.

4. (S) The PM added that he was sending a team to Geneva to participate in UNHCR's January 12-13 planning meetings and to encourage donors to fund a substantial refugee assistance package for use by frontline states. Planning should be for long-term camps and should include, inter alia, establishing schools for refugees on the assumption that camps would likely remain in place for six months to a year or more. The PM asked for strong USG support for a sizable assistance package, noting that other donors would base their contributions on what the USG pledged. He added that initial figures he had heard of USD 3 million in USG pledges would be insufficient for the needs of these camps. The Ambassador assured the PM the USG would be helpful in the effort to ensure refugee camps were properly funded and supplied.

JAF Confirms Policy; Planning for Two Camps Inside Jordan

5. (S) In a January 12 meeting, Jordanian Armed Forces Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (and chief of the GOJ's crisis management center) General Mohamed Majid Al Eitan confirmed to DCM, Refcoord and Army Attache that the GOJ would allow 10,000 to 20,000 Iraqi refugees to enter Jordanian territory "in the first stages of a conflict." Al Eitan reported that the GOJ was prepared to set up four separate refugee/TCN processing facilities and camps: one on the Baghdad-Amman highway border crossing for initial screening of refugees and TCNs; two 75 km inside the Jordanian border near Ruweished (H-4), for care and processing of refugees and TCNs; and one at an Iraqi airbase in Nadayim, to be established only after Iraqi authority

disintegrates. (NOTE: Ruweished, Jordan is also identified on maps as H-4. The Iraqi airbase at Nadayim often is incorrectly identified on maps as Ruweished. The Nadayim airbase is located in the "cut-out" that was traded from Jordan to Iraq several years ago in exchange for similarly sized Iraqi territory.)

16. (S) JAF planners have identified four separate groups of displaced persons likely to seek assistance in Jordan in the event of hostilities in Iraq. First, foreign diplomats and Western nationals fleeing Iraq would be granted immediate entry to Jordan for repatriation through commercial flights from Amman's Queen Alia airport. Second, TCN workers resident in Iraq (believed to number up to 100,000 mostly Egyptian and Sudanese nationals) would be screened and registered at a processing facility on the Baghdad-Amman highway border crossing, where they would be sent in waves to the two camps near Ruweished until they could be repatriated.

(IOM has separately confirmed to us its plans to repatriate TCNs with bus transport to Aqaba and then ship transport to Nuweibeh, Egypt. IOM can handle processing of 2,000 TCNs per boatload. IOM has contracted with appropriate transport companies, but warns that key bus companies could be occupied with Hajj pilgrims if hostilities begin before the end of the Hajj, o/a February 12-13.) Third, the GOJ is prepared to accept an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Iraqi refugees "on humanitarian grounds," and only at the early stages of a conflict in Iraq. Like TCNs, these initial Iraqi refugees would be screened at the staging facility on the Iraqi-Jordanian border and moved to the camps at Ruweished. However, General Al Eitan made clear the GOJ would not accept into Jordan "bad" Iraqis -- former members of the military or otherwise suspect Iraqis -- and would instead hold them at the screening center and possibly the stage two camp at Nadayim airbase. Fourth, the GOJ believes the estimated up to 100,000 Palestinians resident in Iraq could seek to enter Jordan in the event of hostilities in Iraq. Al Eitan confirmed that the GOJ would not allow Palestinians to enter Jordan, telling emboffs that Jordan "suffered a lot" from the 1990-91 influx of Palestinians from the Gulf and is not prepared to accept a similar influx. The GOJ therefore plans to hold the Palestinians at the screening center on the Iraqi-Jordanian border and would facilitate assistance to Palestinians only in that area. Al Eitan added that the GOJ believes most Palestinians resident in Iraq are without any papers -- UNRWA registration or Iraqi travel documents.

GOJ Requests USD 70 Million in Support

17. (S) General Al Eitan confirmed that the GOJ is in the process of negotiating an MOU with UNHCR to delineate responsibilities and, most importantly from the GOJ's perspective, secure financial assistance for humanitarian assistance provided by the GOJ. According to Al Eitan, the GOJ has estimated its humanitarian expenditures at 51 million JD (approx USD 70 million). 15 million JD (USD 21 million) are required to set up the staging ground at the Iraqi-Jordanian border, two camps inside Jordan at Ruweished, a later camp on the Iraqi side of the border, and a military headquarters in the field. Al Eitan confirmed that the 51 million JD covers anticipated military and civilian expenditures and said emboffs could obtain a detailed breakdown of anticipated GOJ costs from the Ministry of Planning. (Comment: From Al Eitan's brief description of the services the GOJ is prepared to provide, the GOJ appears to have thought through important logistical issues such as water (the JAF has requested six desalination units and accompanying water tankers) and health care (one JAF field hospital has been assigned for refugee assistance) and transport. Yet the GOJ also appears to seek compensation for development projects such as water pipelines, sewerage systems and electricity grids. Army Attache will obtain a more detailed list of JAF assistance plans, and USAID Mission Director and Refcoord will meet with the Minister of Planning January 13 to obtain the GOJ's detailed financial request.)

UNHCR's Perspective: Progress but Financial Hurdles Remain

18. (S) In a one-on-one meeting following a January 9 donor briefing, UNHCR Representative Sten Bronee confirmed to refcoord that the GOJ had agreed to accept Iraqi refugees inside Jordanian borders. In order to protect GOJ political equities, UNHCR has agreed that the camps at Ruweished will not be for "refugees" but will be for "displaced people" with the understanding that this group would include Iraqi refugees. Bronee commented that the GOJ seems to have realized it could have a huge public relations disaster if it is caught unprepared with several thousand Iraqi asylum seekers on its border. However, the GOJ also wants to make sure it has financial support from the international community, as it feels that it was "burned" by providing services without compensation during the 1990-1991 refugee

crisis. Bronee said the GOJ has asked the UN for guarantees that it will be reimbursed for all refugee-related expenses.

19. (S) Not surprisingly, UNHCR's MOU negotiations with the GOJ have snagged over GOJ financial requests. Dismissing the GOJ's 51 million JD figures as "enough to build an Olympic city," Bronee said he needed a "reasonable and credible budget" before UNHCR could sign the MOU. Bronee added that UNHCR will not pay for development projects, such as high-quality electrical infrastructure or permanent hospitals. Bronee asked the USG to weigh in with the GOJ on the need to provide detailed, credible financial figures, hinting that perhaps bilateral donors might be prepared to finance development projects that the GOJ wanted to complete in conjunction with refugee assistance.

10. (S) Bronee did not report any of his discussions with the GOJ in the broader donor briefing. Instead, he reported only that the UN is preparing to provide assistance to "large number of displaced people at the Iraqi-Jordanian border." While the UN "hopes" that the GOJ will be able to provide assistance, Bronee said that the GOJ "is not in a position to say so at this time." Echoing comments made by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shaher Bak, Bronee later told refcoord the GOJ is unlikely to change its public position "until the very last minute."

UNHCR Prepositioning Complete

11. (SBU) At the January 9 donor briefing, Bronee announced that with GOJ authorization, UNHCR had prepositioned non-food stocks (tents, plastic sheeting, kerosene heaters, cooking sets, blankets, etc) for 36,000 at a warehouse in Aqaba. The stocks would be used to respond to refugee flows in/toward Jordan and/or Syria. UNHCR also has secured 8600 square meters of additional warehouse space in Amman. Bronee noted that overall UNHCR planning figures for the region have not changed: 600,000 refugees distributed among Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Kuwait. Bronee made a strong pitch for funding, telling donors that of the USD 60 million required to preposition supplies and respond to initial refugee flows, UNHCR had received only USD 16 million -- 6 million from the UN's CERF and 10 million from UNHCR's emergency fund -- all of which must be paid back.

Comment and Action Requests

12. (S) The GOJ's apparent decision to allow Iraqi refugees to enter Jordan in the event of hostilities in Iraq represents an important practical change from previous GOJ policy and contrasts with continuing public GOJ statements which insist that GOJ borders will remain closed. Given GOJ sensitivities on refugee questions (including its steadfast refusal to allow large number of West Bank Palestinians to enter Jordan), as well as its very real desire to limit the number of Iraqi asylum seekers in Jordan, we do not expect the GOJ's public posture to change "until the very last minute." Nevertheless, this change in GOJ policy poses new questions for USG humanitarian planning, such as whether an even partially open border would attract a greater flow of refugees toward Jordan. If so, this argues more strongly for a DART team to be positioned in Jordan. In order to sort out these questions, Embassy Amman would welcome a visit by a senior member(s) of the USG's Humanitarian Planning Team, to assess UN, IO and GOJ capabilities and to explain in greater detail the assistance the USG could offer.

13. (S) Finally, from both a humanitarian and political perspective, we are concerned by two key GOJ planning assumptions. First, the GOJ made it clear that refugees would be admitted to camps in Ruweished only in the initial stages of conflict. The GOJ did not clarify what it intended to do with Iraqi refugees resident in Ruweished after the second-stage camp would be established at Nadayim airbase in Iraq and seems to have hinted that they would be granted only temporary admission to Jordan. We will seek clarification of this policy and remind the GOJ of our non-refoulment concerns. Second, we question whether the GOJ will be able to sustain its categorical refusal to admit Palestinians resident in Iraq. We also are concerned that Palestinians resident in Iraq -- without UNRWA documentation or any other documents to establish their claims to UNRWA status -- could fall through the cracks of the UN refugee system. Although ICRC Jordan Delegate Guy Mellet had previously indicated the ICRC would be prepared to provide assistance to stateless Palestinians displaced as the result of hostilities in Iraq, we request that Geneva clarify this policy at the appropriate time.

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